

Orientation & Mobility Providers Offer Transportation Insights

What Were We Trying to Learn?

O&M providers work with consumers with B/VI to provide personalized instruction on how to travel safely and efficiently. For example, they might teach someone how to use a white cane or help a consumer map out a route that allows them to travel safely through their neighborhood.

Researchers wanted to explore the unique perspectives of O&M providers on the topic of transportation. **Transportation is a huge barrier for blind people who want to work.**

Lack of access to reliable transportation can cause individuals with B/VI to turn down job offers or give up looking for work altogether. O&M providers have a unique perspective on this topic since they teach travel skills, but their point of view is rarely studied by researchers.

Research Takeaway

Orientation & mobility (O&M) providers shared insights on transportation barriers faced by individuals with blindness or visual impairments (B/VI). They suggested that it is essential for consumers to learn skills, such as problem-solving and self-advocacy, which will help them overcome transportation barriers. O&M providers proposed having conversations with consumers about transportation success stories and helping consumers explore a wide variety of transportation options. As counselors work with consumers to find transportation solutions, O&M providers can be valuable allies.

What Are the Most Important Things We Learned?

O&M providers strongly agreed that transportation is a major barrier to employment for the B/VI individuals they work with. They identified a number of main transportation barriers people encounter:

- **Limitations of public transportation:** Public transportation systems have limited hours and routes. Public transportation often doesn't run on weekends or during evening/early morning hours, making it difficult for people who don't work a traditional 9-to-5 job to use these systems. Increasingly, jobs are moving out of city hubs and into the suburbs, but public transportation routes haven't kept up with this shift. Accessing public transportation is especially difficult for people who live in rural areas.
- **Cost of transportation:** Many individuals with B/VI can't afford to hire a private driver, which limits their transportation options. Even paying public transportation fares may be too expensive.
- **Safety issues:** Individuals with B/VI often feel vulnerable using public transportation, although O&M providers stated that they thought these fears were sometimes inflated. Families and friends may spread the idea that public transportation is dangerous, thus stoking fears and further limiting options.
- **Stress:** Public transportation systems can be unreliable, crowded, and loud, making their use extremely stressful for individuals with B/VI.
- **Liability concerns:** For B/VI individuals who try to set up a carpool or driver, worries about liability can get in the way. Rightly or wrongly, drivers may refuse to transport other individuals, fearing that they would be held liable and potentially sued if an accident occurred.

In order to overcome these barriers, O&M providers offered some suggestions:

- **Consider proximity to public transportation:** While relocating may not always be feasible, think about the benefits of living near public transportation. If you are eager to work, it may make sense to relocate to a central location in order to maximize your transportation options.

- **Learn to be a self-advocate:** It's important to be able to advocate for yourself with employers and public transportation providers in order to find solutions to transportation challenges.
- **Consider using bioptics:** This technology can allow some individuals with low vision to drive themselves. O&M providers thought more people should be aware of this option.

How Do These Findings Relate to Me?

When working with consumers, focus on helping them **develop problem-solving skills**. Talk them through transportation challenges, such as finding a driver or negotiating carpool arrangements. Ask them how they would handle these challenges, and make sure you're actively talking with them about how to set up transportation arrangements (for example, negotiating a carpool arrangement or tipping a cab driver).

Along with problem-solving skills, consumers also need to **develop self-advocacy skills**. Consumers can use these skills to negotiate with employers to see if they're open to assisting with their employees' transportation needs, perhaps by subsidizing travel costs or providing flexible work schedules to accommodate public transportation use.

While they reported rarely having direct conversations with consumers about transportation, **O&M providers may be valuable allies for VR counselors as they help consumers make transportation plans**. For instance, an O&M provider may be able to help ease a consumer's fears about using public transportation by practicing with them.

Counselors should also **be on alert for consumers with low vision who may qualify to use a bioptic device to drive**. O&M providers sometimes refer consumers for these devices, which implies that VR counselors did not recognize consumers who might benefit from this technology during their initial intake.

Finally, when talking with consumers about transportation options, share success stories, both personal and from other clients. Hearing about others' experiences and success in overcoming challenges may spark ideas and generate conversation.

How Was This Project Carried Out?

Researchers conducted a focus group of six O&M providers to talk about transportation issues encountered by consumers. Participants met for two hours of discussion during a national conference.

Learn More

Findings were taken from the following article:

Crudden, A. (2015). Transportation issues: Perspectives of orientation & mobility providers. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 109(6), 457- 468.

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